

UNIT 17—The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath / Rev. 16:1–21

Scripture

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

²The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

³The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

⁴The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

*"You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, the Holy One,*

because you have so judged;

*⁶for they have shed the blood of your
saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink
as they deserve."*

⁷And I heard the altar respond:

*"Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments."*

⁸The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. ⁹They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

Group Questions

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- ☐ What first-hand experience have you had with a natural disaster? What happened? What are your most vivid memories about it?
- ☐ What would be the worst plague for you to experience: Sores all over your body? Intense heat without air conditioning? Total darkness? Or great thirst with very little water? Why?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- ☐ What contents are in each bowl of wrath? Why are these plagues worse than those ushered in by the trumpets (contrast, for example, 8:8 with 16:3)? What was the function of the trumpet plagues? What is the function of the plagues in this passage?
- ☐ Why does the angel (speaking on behalf of the waters) react to the outpouring of God's wrath, not with pain or sorrow, but with recognition of divine justice?
- ☐ What has God done in your life to help you repent? How receptive are you to admitting your guilt and repenting when you sin?
- ☐ What is described in the interlude (vv. 13–16) between the sixth and seventh bowls? What function did the frogs perform?
- ☐ What are the "frogs" that are battling with you? How is the battle going?
- ☐ How will the just purposes of God and the evil purposes of Satan finally and awfully converge at Armageddon (or "hill of Megiddo," an historic crossroads of the Middle East)? With what result (vv. 17–21)?
- ☐ Compare the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls to each other and to the 10 plagues of Egypt (Ex. 7–10). What examples of contrast (e.g., "not only ... but ...") can you find in each section? What is the connection between the three scenes (chronological, logical or what)? How would these scenes comfort John's original readers? How would you explain the necessity of the plagues to someone who is not a Christian?
- ☐ If "war is hell" could John's vision be that "hell is war"? What does this passage tell you about God's judgment?

[Scripture and Group Questions continued on page 60]

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Notes

16:1–21 The whole of chapter 16 is given over to the emptying of the bowls. The parallels are clear between the plagues here and those that followed the trumpets. In each series, the first four plagues come upon earth, sea, fresh water, and heavenly bodies in that order. The fifth plagues both have to do with great pain; the sixth brought invasions from across the Euphrates. Both sets of plagues parallel the plagues in Egypt. One major difference between the trumpet plagues and the bowl plagues is their intensity. While the trumpet plagues were limited (usually they affected only a third), the bowl plagues encompass the whole. A second difference is that the first four trumpet plagues fall on the land, while the first four bowl plagues directly impact men and women.

16:1 a loud voice from the temple. This is most likely the voice of God, since 15:8 states that no one could enter the temple until the plagues were complete. **bowls of God's wrath.** "These plagues are not the expression of God's wrath against sin in general, nor are they punishments for individual wrongdoing. They are the outpouring of his wrath upon him who would frustrate the divine purpose in the world—the beast—and upon those who have given their loyalty to him" (Ladd).

16:2 The first plague falls upon those who bear the mark of the beast, marking them with loathsome boils. This plague parallels the sixth Egyptian plague (Ex 9:8–11).

16:3 The second plague turns the oceans and seas into blood, killing all the sea life. This parallels the first Egyptian plague (Ex 7:20–21) and the second trumpet plague (8:8–9). **blood like that of a dead man.** Such blood would be thick, dark, clotted, and putrid.

16:4 The third plague did the same to all the fresh water. There would thus be no water to drink in the land. This parallels the third trumpet plague (8:10–11).

16:5–6 An angel breaks in on this unrelenting unfolding of tragedy in order to attest to the rightness of God in doing this.

16:5 The song in this verse closely parallels the song of the victorious martyrs in 15:3–4. It states that the judgments of God are not capricious but just. **the angel in**

charge of the water. There is no other mention in the Bible of such an angel. However, in other Jewish literature, angels are in charge of natural phenomena. One such book mentions an angel who had the power to restrain the underground waters.

16:6 Yet another reason is given for the fact that God turned the waters to blood. Because they had poured out the blood of the saints, they have been given blood to drink.

16:7 Another voice affirms that the judgments of God are just. **I heard the altar respond.** This is the only time in Revelation in which the altar itself is said to speak. In 6:9 voices came from under the altar, and in 9:13 a voice came from the horns of the altar. There may be, however, some connection between these three voices. The pouring out of this wrath is, perhaps, connected to the vindication of those who have been martyred and who speak from beneath the altar (6:9–10), and to the prayers of the persecuted saints (8:3–4).

16:8–9 The fourth plague strikes the sun so that it flares up, scorching and searing people. The impact of the fourth trumpet fell on the sun, moon, and stars but it brought the opposite effect (darkness, not intense light). **they cursed the name of God.** They know full well who is behind these calamities. **they refused to repent.** Even at this point, it seems, repentance is possible. Still, they will not turn to God. Like Pharaoh, who saw the plagues and yet would not change, their hearts are hard. "They have wholly taken on the character of the false god they serve" (Caird).

16:10–11 The fifth plague directly attacks the heart of the problem. It assaults the throne of the beast and plunges his kingdom into darkness. This darkness parallels the ninth Egyptian plague (Ex 10:21–29). **gnawed their tongues in agony.** They have no water to drink; the rivers, streams, and springs have been turned to blood. **their pain.** Probably from the scorching sun. **their sores.** The sores (which they received as a result of the first plague) continue to afflict them. In other words, the impact of the plagues build one upon another.

16:12–16 The sixth plague dries up the great river Euphrates. Since it is no longer a barrier, an invasion is planned. (See Ex 14:21 and Jos 3:14–17 for other examples of God drying up water.) The sixth trumpet